

# Holier Than Thou

*"I am not an apologist for this or any other administration."*

By Wayne Barrett

Archbishop John J. O'Connor has made God a registered Republican. O'Connor registered as a Republican himself in October 1980, just a month before Ronald Reagan's first election, using his sister's home in Pennsylvania as his address. Checks with half a dozen election boards in the cities where O'Connor has lived and a protracted stirring of O'Connor's vague memory suggest that the archbishop has, to the degree that he's been registered at all, stuck with God's Own Party since 1946. Two weeks after he caused such a fuss over Democratic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro's abortion position, he registered in New York for the first time and changed his party affiliation to independent.

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## On the Campaign Trail

The focus on the Ferraro flap has obscured O'Connor's broader role in the national politics of 1984. In light of new facts, that chronology merits a detailed retelling:

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• O'Connor's mid-October timing could not have been better for the Republicans. A month earlier the archbishop had scheduled an October 15 major address in New York, responding to Governor Cuomo's Notre Dame speech and entitled, "Human Lives, Human Rights." He could not then have anticipated that Walter Mondale would at that same time decline his invitation to the annual Al Smith dinner and ask that Ferraro substitute for him. In view of what O'Connor had already said about Ferraro, it was no surprise that the archdiocese's dinner committee declined to let her speak. The two stories broke the same day: O'Connor made his strongest antiabortion pitch ever (87 references to abortion and 32 to the unborn in a 30-page speech) and the committee nixed Ferraro. Even the *Post's* headline juxtaposition of the two events was justifiable.

Four days later Reagan dominated a dinner that honors a Democratic governor but has become a rich Republican event. Sitting between Nancy and Ronald Reagan was industrialist J. Peter Grace, the archdiocese's leading Catholic layman, who is now spending millions on the-baby-pays-for-the-deficit television ads to publicize his own fanatical, budget-bombing conservatism. A matter of some recent controversy because of his corporate ties to a Nazi war criminal and his much publicized description of food stamps as "basically a Puerto Rican program," Grace has long been associated with CIA-linked enterprises like Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe, and the agency's Latin American conduit, American Institute for Free Labor Development. Grace now chairs a commission—the President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Controls—that has undertaken what Reagan calls "the largest effort of its kind ever mounted to save tax dollars."

Next to the archbishop was Clare Booth Luce, the matriarch of the Catholic right wing in America, a former ambassador to Italy and a current member of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which oversees covert operations. Grace and Luce were members of a board chaired by O'Connor since 1982—the Pope John Paul II Center of Prayer and Study for Peace. In addition to such prominent local Democrats as the governor and the mayor, O'Connor's head table also included current CIA director William Casey and former treasury secretary William Simon, one of the leading forces in the current Catholic laymen's attack on the national bishops' progressive pastoral letter on the economy.

"It's clearly a biased dinner," said Democratic historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "When Cardinal Cooke was there it was a very nonpartisan thing. But Admiral O'Connor is clearly a Reaganite and he's trying to transform a fairly nonpartisan event into a Reagan rally." In fact, the dinner had become increasingly Republican prior to O'Connor's arrival—GOP gubernatorial candidate Lew Lehrman got top billing at the 1982 dinner—but the Ferraro rejection was the culmi-

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